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# WASHINGTON and LINCOLN.

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There are two names in American history, which we instinctively feel, belong in a class by themselves. Other great men we have had,—men who were indispensable; men who were as great, if not greater in intellect; men who in special departments have been even superior; but when we consider them all in all, in dignity, and force of character, in the range and balance of their faculties, and in the full extent and importance of the work they accomplished,—there are none others who may be compared with the man who achieved American independence and the man who saved the American union. They are the two loftiest peaks among the mountains; the two stateliest oaks in the forest. Washington and Lincoln are in many respects so different, in many respects so alike, that it is worth while, for once, to think of them both together and upon the same occasion.

The work of these men was different, but devoted to the same structure; their personal characteristics were unlike, their great influence the same. No one reads the life of Washington and then the life of Lincoln, to rise from the perusal with conflicting emotions; to feel that one has weakened the inspiration he gained from the other. No matter which one he takes first, the other will deepen the impression for good. He will find the same lofty motives, the same consecration to duty, the same belief in the omnipotence of right and truth, the same unswerving patriotism, the same faith in the people, the same reliance upon God. It is fortunate that men of this

type were our leaders; but only men of this type could have become our leaders. In the long run, the American people know whom to trust.

## I.—Birth and Education.

When we go back to the beginning, how different was the origin of these two men!

Washington has a pedigree more than respectable; he came of a family which may be traced in English heraldry, some of whose members sleep in close companionship with the noble name of Spencer. He was familiar in the household of a well-bred English nobleman, and received the education that belonged to his condition. Behind Lincoln are only "the short but simple annals of the poor." Sprung from poverty and illiteracy, he gained his education in the manner described by one of his early companions: "When Abe and I returned to the house from work," writes John Hanks, "he would go to the cupboard, snatch a piece of cornbread, sit down, take a book, cock his legs up as high as his head, and read. We grubbed, plowed, weeded and worked together barefooted in the field. Whenever Abe had a chance in the field, while at work or at the house, he would stop and read."

Washington from his youth mingled with the most cultivated society of his day; Lincoln grew up among farmhands and grocery clerks and village artizans. From first to last, there were traces of the aristocrat in Washington; from first to last, Lincoln was always the man of the people. Washington was stately and dignified in person. Lincoln was so lank and ungainly that Stanton called him the "original gorilla." Washington brooked no familiarity; Lincoln was "hail fellow, well met" with all his old friends and neighbors. Hamilton once offered Morris a dinner for himself and a dozen friends if he would, at the next reception evening, gently slap Washington on the back and say, "My dear general, how happy I am to see you look so well!" Morris made the venture. Washington withdrew the hand which he had given,

stepped back suddenly, and fixed his eye on Morris with an angry glance, until the adventurous friend retreated and sought refuge in the crowd which had looked on in silence. On the other hand, at a White House reception in 1863, an old farmer and his wife who had come to the capital to see a son sick in the hospital, were overawed by the splendid reception and shrank back to the wall. A young English nobleman was just being presented to the president. Tall and stately, Mr. Lincoln a moment after, in looking over the heads of the assembly, spied the old couple, and said: "Excuse me, my lord, there's an old friend of mine." Passing backward to the door, Mr. Lincoln said as he grasped the old farmer's hand: "Why, John, I'm glad to see you. I haven't seen you since you and I made rails for old Mr. —, in Sangamon county in 1847." The old man turned to his wife with quivering lips, and without replying to the salutation said: "Mother, he's just the same old Abe!"

People admired Washington; Lincoln they loved. They revered the wisdom of one; they were touched by the humanity of the other. They contemplated at a distance the supreme greatness of Washington; they drew near to the all-embracing heart of Lincoln. Washington was on a pedestal; Lincoln sat by every fireside. And yet whatever may have been his personal bearing, Washington believed in the people, worked for them, sacrificed for them, went straight forward in the way of duty, and gave himself to establish a government in which the people should be supreme. Near the close of the revolution, a proposition was made in a certain quarter to crown him king. Here was at least the opportunity to make the attempt for a throne. If any one could have secured it, he could. But with what indignation did his soul rise against the mere suggestion! How he flamed against the projectors! "If I am not deceived in the knowledge I have of myself," he wrote to Colonel Nicola, "you could not have found a person to whom your schemes could be more disagreeable. Never mention the subject to me again!"

## II.—Mental and Moral Characteristics.

When we come to speak of their mental and moral characteristics, there are the same likenesses and differences.

First—How MODEST they were!

Neither could sound a trumpet proclaiming his own merits. When the constitutional congress was about to choose a general, and the discussion pointed to but one man as that choice, John Adams, who was speaking, relates that “Mr. Washington, who happened to sit near the door, as soon as he heard me allude to him, from his usual modesty darted into the library room.” The debates with Douglas had already made Lincoln a national character, when he earnestly requested an Illinois journal to mention him no more for president; “I must in candor say that I do not think myself fit for the presidency.” And yet when the die was cast, Washington girded on his sword for the field, and Lincoln braced himself for the burdens of state.

Second—what TENDERNESS there was in these great men!

The iron reserve of Washington was broken down pathetically at the death of his stepchild; Lincoln never recovered from the grief that fell upon him at the grave of his son. When staying for a time at Fortress Monroe, with some members of his cabinet, awaiting tidings from Pennsylvania — sitting alone in his room with his favorite “Shakspeare,” he called in an aide and said: “Colonel, come in here; you have been writing long enough. I want to read you a passage in Hamlet”; and he read from the debate concerning the future state; then from the third act of “King John,” in which Constance bewails her imprisoned boy:

“And Father Cardinal, I have heard you say  
That we shall see and know our friends in  
heaven;

If that be true, I shall see my boy again.”

Then, overcome with emotion, he told of how he had recently dreamed of his own lost boy, and dropped his head on the table and sobbed aloud.

Third—Washington and Lincoln were masters of themselves.

Each had the royal scepter of self-control. Breakfasting one morning with

General and Mrs. Washington, General Lee remarked: "I saw your portrait the other day, but Stuart says you have a tremendous temper." "Mr. Stuart takes a great deal upon himself to make such a remark," said Mrs. Washington. "But, my dear lady," answered General Lee, "he added that the president has it under wonderful control." To which Washington, with something like a smile, rejoined: "He is right." Once in awhile, however, that slumbering volcano shot forth a stream of fire that burned and consumed where it fell. We remember now how he cursed the renegade Charles Lee at the battle of Monmouth till the thunder of the cannon seemed tame; how he denounced Peyton Randolph who, in his own cabinet, had plotted against him, as a traitor; and how he burst in imprecations upon the head of St. Clair, who had allowed his army to be surprised and cut to pieces: "O, God, he is worse than a murderer! How can he answer it to his country? The blood of the slain is upon him—the curse of widows and orphans—the curse of heaven!" Rarer still were the occasions on which Lincoln gave way to anger. He was the very incarnation of patience and endurance. But it is related of him that once when a petitioner was impertinent and accused him of unfairness, Mr. Lincoln seized him by the scruff of the neck and marching him to the door, threw him out of the White House.

Both men had heartaches, both had worries and irritations, both carried burdens such as had never been laid upon other shoulders, both met with opposition and abuse such as had never been aimed at other heads. In spite of it all, neither lost faith in his cause or his country; neither became embittered; neither refused to go on; each was made stronger, as the oak grows strong that strives with storms.

In the case of Washington, Mr. Wisner says that the infant republic did all it could to prevent Washington from setting it on its legs. "The infant republic struggled tooth and nail against this; in fact against every measure adopted for its soundness and permanence. The infant republic may be

to him?" "I conceded nothing," Mr. Lincoln responded, "I simply worked around him, and took three hours doing it. And all the time I was doing it I was in mortal fear that he would find out what I was doing. I reminded myself of a farmer out west. He had a big log lying in the middle of his best field, and all his neighbors wondered how he would manage it. But before long there was his crop growing as fine as you please, and the farmer was as happy as could be. They asked how he had got rid of the log. 'Why,' said he, 'that durn log was too big to haul and too knotty to split and too soggy to burn. So I just plowed around it.'"

### III.—Principles of Action.

Washington and Lincoln were guided by the same great principles.

First—Each was DEEPLY RELIGIOUS, though in no formal way.

Washington believed devoutly in God. He was brought up an Anglican churchman, was to the last a worshipper at the altars of that church, and found in its liturgy the religious strength and inspiration which he needed.

A consistent churchman himself, Washington was broadly tolerant. In 1775, when the New England troops proposed to celebrate Guy Fawkes' day as usual, the general orders declared that "as the commander-in-chief has been apprised of a design, formed for the observance of that ridiculous and childish custom of burning the effigy of the pope, he cannot help expressing his surprise that there should be officers and soldiers in this army so void of common sense as not to see the impropriety of such a step." When trying to secure some servants, too, he wrote that "if they are good workmen, they may be from Asia, Africa or Europe; they may be Mahometans, Jews or Christians of any sect, or they may be Atheists." He opposed the bill to tax the people of Virginia for the support of the Episcopal church. He wrote to Lafayette: "I am not less ardent in my wish that you may succeed in your plan of toleration in religious matters. Being no bigot myself, I am disposed



to indulge the professors of Christianity in the church with that road to heaven which shall seem to them the most direct, plainest, easiest and least liable to exception."

Lincoln was a member of no church. Jesse K. Fell, to whom Mr. Lincoln confided the first details of his biography, and who, all things considered, perhaps was the most appreciative and intelligent intimate of Abraham Lincoln during his Illinois career, has made a careful statement which is published in Mr. Herndon's "Life." Mr. Fell says:

"I should say that his expressed views on these and kindred subjects were such as, in the estimation of most believers, would place him outside the Christian pale. Yet, to my mind, such was not the true position, since his principles and practices, and the spirit of his whole life were the very kind we universally agree to call Christian; and I think this conclusion is in no wise affected by the circumstance that he never attached himself to any religious society whatever. His religious views were eminently practical, and are summed up in these two propositions: Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man."

One incident of Mr. Lincoln may be mentioned in this connection. A reverent man, but chary of committing himself to religious forms, Mr. Lincoln was willing to issue orders urging decent behavior in camp on Sunday and condemning profanity at all times. At length it appeared that the gravest desecration of the Sabbath which was possible for the union armies was for them to engage in battle on the Lord's day. So an eminent theologian called on the president to make personal protest. Mr. Lincoln, as usual, listened attentively and respectfully. When the full argument had been stated, he glanced upward with a smile and observed: "Do you know that this administration is in entire accord with those sentiments?" "I am more than gratified to hear it," answered the good clergyman. "Yes, indeed; and there is only one other influence now, that you need bring to bear in order to stop the pernicious practice of fighting battles on Sunday." "What is it, Mr. Presi-

dent?" "Why, just see the confederate generals and get them to let our soldiers alone, on Sunday."

Second—Washington and Lincoln both believed in the might of right.

During the sessions of the constitutional convention, so many were the compromises and half-measures suggested, so many palliatives must be applied to different sections, so many sopas thrown to demagogues and agitators, that it was difficult to carry through any effective measures. Washington urged in season and out of season, the sentiment attributed to him by Governor Morris: "It is too probable that no plan we propose will be adopted. Perhaps another dreadful conflict is to be sustained. If to please the people, we offer what we ourselves cannot approve, how can we afterwards defend our work? Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair; the result is in the hand of God." Fiske, the historian, adds: "These words ought to be blazoned in letters of gold on the walls of every American assembly that shall meet to nominate a candidate, or declare a policy or pass a law, so long as the weakness of human nature shall endure."

In his Cooper Institute speech, Lincoln exclaimed: "Let us have faith that right makes might!" No nobler words ever fell from his lips than those in response to a clergyman who said that "he hoped that the Lord was on our side." "I am not at all concerned about that," said Mr. Lincoln, "for I know that the Lord is always on the side of right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that this nation shall be on the Lord's side."

Third—Washington and Lincoln were, above and beyond all else, patriots, lovers of their country, devoted to her interests.

No suspicion of self-seeking ever fell across their motives. No personal ambition guided their efforts. For the sake of his country, Washington endured the tongue slander and the hand of opposition. For her sake, he kept heart and hope under every discouragement. It was said of him as it was said of Cincinnatus, "He abandons everything for his country." The

same words might be written with equal truth of Lincoln. The Duke of Wellington said of Washington: "I esteem Washington as the noblest character of modern times—possibly of all times." An Italian statesman said of Lincoln: "Lincoln stood higher in my estimation and love than all the Alexanders and Cæsars who have reddened the pages of history with their brilliant exploits."

#### IV.—The Work They Accomplished.

The work that was given to each of these men was different; but each one saw quickly and clearly what the work was and addressed himself to his task. Every American ought to thank God today that He raised up, when the time was ripe, these mighty heroes and leaders.

Washington, "with the intuition of a world-hero, apprehended the strange circumstances of the hour; he dipped into the future, he related the present to the future, the actual to the possible. In the midst of disunited colonies, a country in anarchy, an inefficient congress, a disorganized and rebellious army, Washington singled out the central idea and held it firmly despite the Babel of discordant policies and treasonable conspiracies that would have swept him from the scene. He heard God say

'I am tired of kings,  
I suffer them no more,'

and for a quarter of a century he moved before his struggling countrymen, their pillar of cloud by day, of fire by night. \* \* \* Through all the perils of the revolution, through all the dangers of the critical period which succeeded, he led his murmuring people on to a union—of thirteen independent, sovereign states"—under a federal constitution. A new nation has arisen above the horizon of the ages.

Washington had been sleeping in honor but little more than three-score years, when Lincoln was called to his great task. "Against the nation's peace a combination had been formed," says Mr. E. P. Powell. "Mistaken men honestly believed that they could make two nations where Washington

had made one, and still maintain universal peace. Then came the second supreme American, and he came out of the west. Politicians thought him an accident, \* \* \* Pharisees loitered in the temple of state, gossiped as usual about the New Messiah and superciliously inquired, 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?' \* \* \* Many of the departments of government were in the hands of southern sympathizers. The treasury was empty, public credit low. The arsenals had been ravaged. The army was but a little guard, distributed at distant posts; the navy was small and scattered. \* \* \* Timid tongues were clamoring for peace at any price. The friends who loved him best were conspicuously uneasy \* \* \* lest he prove unequal. Congress embarrassed him. His party deserted him. The cabinet gave him scant respect. Politicians schemed openly for his downfall. Everybody but Lincoln missed the real issue, and while all America was in a panic, the north crying 'Lo here!' and the south 'Lo there!' he took his place in the pantheon of world-heroes by seizing out of the confusion of the time, the central idea and firmly holding it until his grip relaxed in death. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the union! \* \* \* And in saving the union, he saved for his country and the world at large the peace which Washington had established in the western hemisphere."

## V.—The Verdict of History.

Washington and Lincoln! Each was greatest in his own time. Each had his own work to do and the results of that work rise fair before our eyes. Both were needed in the plans of God. both are entitled to the gratitude of men.

Washington's work covered a wider range. Lincoln's was concentrated upon a single point. Washington's formed an era, Lincoln's controlled a crisis; but who can tell, whether in the sweep of history and the eyes of God, the era or the crisis is more important? Washington blended into the

flag the original thirteen stripes; Lincoln held to their places in the field of blue the original thirteen stars and all the new ones that had been born into the constellation. That which Washington organized, Lincoln perpetuated. The union that Washington founded, Lincoln saved. The ship that the one launched upon the sea of time, the other steered with skillful hand, through storms and breakers to the port of peace. And when, with tattered sails and splintered mast, the vessel came into the haven at last, it was found that the slaves whom Washington had left bound in the hold, Lincoln — the great captain — had unchained that they might help to save the ship; and their hymns of deliverance mingled with the shouts of the passengers, that the awful voyage was ended, and the storm had rolled vanquished away! Washington and Lincoln! Father and Savior of their country, they clasp hands across the generations. One of the old councils that debated the doctrine of the Trinity, decided that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son. From this human Father and Savior, from Washington and Lincoln—may there proceed a Holy Spirit,—the spirit of patriotism, of political truth and honor and virtue, the spirit of devotion to high and noble ends, the spirit of fidelity to our political responsibilities, that shall shape the citizens of this country into the image and likeness of their illustrious leaders!

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